

## [Charles Kerr]

W15022

1 Conn. [1938-9?] Kerr

Charles Kerr, who according to reports among his neighbors at Reynolds Bridge, has inherited a "fortune" from distant relatives, and is "drinking it up", lives with his son in a small house on the flat. Mr. Kerr answers my knock this afternoon, red of face and watery eyed, and it is obvious that he has taken on considerable alcoholic refreshment as [protection?] against the heat of the day.

"You here again?" he says, "Seems like every time somebody knocks lately, it's you. I told you and told you I don't want to buy none." I explain that I am not selling, and that I am merely seeking information. Mr. Kerr looks at me through narrowed eyes.

"Oh, yes, I remember you now. Knew damn well you'd been here before. I got you mixed up with someone else. Well, come on in, come in, before you get sunstroke. Sit down. You're the one lookin' up knife shop history. Why don't you see Jim Truelove? He knows all about that old stuff. Whattya wanta come around askin' me for? Oh, you saw Truelove. Well, why didn't you say so? He come from Sheffield. So'd my old man, but I didn't. Truelove was a good man, good blade forger. My old man said he wasn't as good as he thought he was, though. Said nobody could be that good. He told that to Jim himself, my old man did. Jim worked on those surgical instruments and he kind of held himself above the others. Thought he knew more about knives than God Almighty.

"My old man was a cutler, and he taught me to be a cutler and we worked together a good many years and quite a few places. Bradleyville and Woodbury and Thomaston and so on. Now what is it 2 you want to know? I can't tell you anything. Want to know how knives were made? Go see Henry Gill, he'll show you right in his little factory.

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"Hell, that's all over with long ago, far's I's concerned. What I's tryin' to do now is forget about it. It's a damn good thing I don't have to depend on it to live. My son Bill when he was a kid, he didn't want to go to school. He quit when he was fourteen, I wanted him to keep it up but he wouldn't. So he came to me and he wanted me to get him a job in the knife shop. 'Like hell,' I says, 'like hell I'll get you a job.' He says, 'All right,' he says, 'the knife shop ain't the only place in the world. I'll get a job.' He got one, too. Jobs were plentiful then. He went right up here't the clock shop and got a job. They made an ear timer of him and now he's over in Ingraham's, pullin' down good money. So it turned out I done him a favor, after all.

"Well, anyway—This shop down on the highway. Where the bakelite factory stands now. It woulda lasted longer if it'd been managed right. The guy owner it payed no attention to it—off skyhootin' around half the time. I ain't sayin' it would be runnin' yet, but it woulda lasted longer if there'd been more attention paid to it. Gus Klocker, he was tryin' to run it, and go out on the road sellin' and everything else, and it was too much of a job for him, and Frost, he didn't give a damn what happened anyway, and first thing you know, it was closed down.

"And the old village has been on the bum ever since. Why, 3 hell, there's people here livin' in tents. I ain't sayin' they're knifemakers, I's just telling you. Know a family been livin' in a tent since last fall. Spent the whole damn winter in one, and said they was comfortable enough until this hot weather came. I can't see where it'd be very comfortable though, can you?

"Oh, yes, it was a prosperous little place when the factory was goin' good. I worked in the other one, too, you know, the one that's all fallin' apart over in the center of the village. Good little shop, one time, too. "Mr. Kerr pauses to fan himself with a newspaper and mutters a malediction upon the weather. He follows this with a string of curses directed at the swarming flies, and gets out of his chair to take forceful but ineffectual action with the

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folded newspaper. A particularly energetic swing is nearly his undoing, and he is forced to grasp the kitchen table for support. He seats himself unsteadily and relaxes, panting.

“Now they's one thing,” he [says?], “Lord, but it's hot. They's one thing they say about the knifemakers, and if you hear it, remember it's greatly exaggerated. Greatly exaggerated. People say they abused liquor—they drank too much. Well, I ain't sayin' they never drank, but drinkin' is a human failin', and it ain't confined to knifemakers. They never drank no more's other people. Don't let anyone tell you different.

“Say, whyn't you go and see Billy Morehouse? He was a grinder. Lives over at the other end, near the Watertown road. You been to see him? Well, you get around don't you? Well, I can't tell you nothin'. I ain't no goddamn historian. Slam that screen door, there's flies enough in here. God, it's hot, ain't it?”